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TAGS: PREL PGOV RS

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH NEW OSCE MOLDOVA HEAD OF MISSION

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.4
(b,d).

¶1. (C) In a February 1 meeting with the Ambassador, recently appointed OSCE Head of Mission for Moldova Philip Remler reviewed the highlights of his round of meetings with the "5 2" partners on Transnistria status negotiations. In Moscow, Remler discussed possible ways forward with DFM Karasin, National Security Council Deputy Secretary Zubakov, and MFA Transnistria Special Negotiator Nesterushkin. Remler noted that Moldovan Reintegration Minister Sova, Presidential Advisor Tkaciuk, and Transnistria Parliamentary Speaker Shevchuk were in Moscow to discuss (separately) the remaining obstacles to a possible agreement.

¶2. (C) Remler told the Ambassador that Zubakov and Karasin seemed more "enthusiastic" about the prospects for a Transnistria settlement in the near future. Ambassador agreed, noting that Putin foreign policy advisor Sergey Prikhodko strongly suggested in a February 1 meeting that the Kremlin has put pressure on Chisinau and Tiraspol to reach a settlement prior to Putin's departure. Given the looming Kosovo CDI, Russia would like to show the West that there is a right way and a wrong way to resolve frozen conflicts, and that Russia's "negotiated" approach was the right way.

¶3. (C) According to Remler's discussions with Russian officials, Russia was particularly concerned about "guarantees" that Moldova would keep its neutrality vis-a-vis NATO. Given Ukraine's announced intent to seek a NATO Membership Action Plan at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Russian sensitivities about Moldova's stance on eventual NATO membership were heightened. Based on his discussions with Moldovan and Transnistrian leaders, Remler believes Moldova is not interested in NATO membership and thus would be willing to satisfy Russian concerns in the form of a guarantee. Remler noted that the Russians did not have a problem with Moldova eventually seeking EU membership. GOR officials also told Remler that Russia insisted on maintaining its peacekeeping forces (PKF) in Transnistria at least until a settlement had been reached.

¶4. (C) Remler said that he had identified clarifying the technical and legal aspects of railroad links as one area of cooperation between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Both sides agreed collaboration on this subject was necessary and was a realistic confidence building measure. Remler proposed forming a working group on railroad links to the 5 2 members. Chisinau, Tiraspol, and Moscow were on board; the Europeans were considering the idea, but remain focused on returning to final status negotiations. Remler believes that a 3 2 meeting could be held as early as the end of February, and he promised to develop a roadmap on a return to final status negotiations in time for the meeting. Ideally, the 3 2 meeting would lead to the resumption of formal 5 2 negotiations.

¶5. (C) The Russians indicated to Remler that that they were "fed up" with Smirnov and would like to replace him, but did not know with whom. Remler said that Russia viewed Transnistria's leadership as divided into two camps: the status quo Smirnov camp and the more progressive Shevchuk camp. Smirnov opposes the resumption of formal negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol, and Remler recounted Litskai's comments after an informal 5 2 gathering in the Chisinau Russian ambassador's residence that the "siloviki" in the Smirnov administration were pressuring Smirnov to engage in military action in villages along the West Bank in an effort to undermine negotiations. Shevchuk, on the other hand, represented those business leaders who have found it profitable to receive trade preferences from EU countries in exchange for their willingness to trade with Moldovan companies. Remler commented that the EU possessed considerable leverage over a settlement, given the economic incentives they could provide to both sides in exchange for cooperation between each other.

BURNS